

I don't remember much about how my mom – Laura Strelow – and I discovered the Ice Age Trail. It started in the summer of 2019 before we started hiking the trail intentionally. We went on a family trip to Door County and were trail running in Potawatomi State Park when we noticed the yellow blazes. But we had no clue what they meant or what the trail even was. Sometime between then and January 2020, we learned a little bit about the trail and decided to start hiking on it.

Our first hike was on the Chaffee Creek and Wedde Creek segments, and we were hooked! Even though we had fun doing those segments, we later found out that we needed to complete the connecting routes in between to become Thousand Milers someday. It was a little irritating, but we went back and completed those tiny connecting routes we missed eventually. That was just one of the many things that happened that we didn't expect when we started out.

We also didn't expect to have to deal with a lot of ticks, put on bug nets, or meet so many people on the trail with the same goal as us in mind.

At some point, we met Paul, Lee, and the rest of the Get Off the Couch crew. They got us to hike a lot of miles with them throughout our own journey, and they all wanted to become Thousand Milers, too! They helped us get through long connecting routes that we may not have otherwise been able to get done as quickly as we did, and they were a fun group to hike with because of their enthusiasm. We are both glad we met them!

As time went along through the pandemic and beyond, my mom and I worked on hiking the trail at any chance we could get. It was tough sometimes for us to get out because I was in high school and then college and I had a busy schedule, as many students do. And my mom often worked weekends, which meant that our schedules were significantly different from each other. But we were able to overcome our busy schedules and hike what we needed to.

Eventually, we kicked it into gear and started hiking further and more frequently than we had before. This past summer, I chose to not work my normal part-time job and my mom saved up PTO for the sake of finishing the trail before the end of 2023. That meant more overnight trips and trying to squeeze whatever miles we could out of each day, as well as more early mornings (I did not like early mornings!) We ended up hiking over 100 miles per month from June to August this past summer, much more than our previous record of 70 miles in a month during the peak of the pandemic!

After many hikes, a lot of help from others in the Ice Age Trail community, and a lot of time spent away from home; we finished our journey at the Eastern Terminus with some of our family in attendance. What we initially thought was going to be a 5-year plan turned into a total of 3 years and 10 months. We finally did it, and we both agree that the journey was worth every mile!

Bailey Arndt